





[Skip navigation](#)
[More Options](#) 

- Select a School 
 - [South Madison Community School Corporation](#)
 - [East Elementary School](#)
 - [Maple Ridge Elementary School](#)
 - [Pendleton Elementary School](#)
 - [Pendleton Heights High School](#)
 - [Pendleton Heights Middle School](#)
- Language 
- 
- 
- Login



SOUTH MADISON
Community School Corporation

[Home](#) [Schools](#) [About Us](#) [News](#) [Departments](#) [Parents & Students](#) [Staff](#) [Employment](#)

Blended Learning (1:1)

[Menus](#)

USDA Free Meals
Waiver

[Meal Applications](#)

[Payments &
Policies](#)

[Contact Us](#)

USDA FREE MEALS WAIVER

South Madison Community School
Corporation » [Departments](#) » [Nutrition Services](#) » [USDA Free Meals
Waiver](#)

**USDA Free Meals Waiver
(SY 20-21 & SY 21-22)**

last updated 7/20/21

[Account
Refund/Transfer
Request Form](#)

[Non-
Discrimination
Statement](#)

[SY 21-22 Weekly
Meal Distribution](#)

This program has been extended through School Year 2021-22!

SMCSC is pleased to announce that the USDA has approved a nationwide waiver due to the ongoing COVID19 pandemic that ALL students, regardless of socioeconomic status, can receive FREE meals at school.

What is considered a "free meal"?

Students can receive 1 FREE lunch AND 1 FREE breakfast per school day.

Meals must meet the existing guidelines that USDA has put forth and SMCSC has followed in order to be free. Ala carte items will still be an additional charge. These items include extra entrees and milk (all schools) and snacks/drinks (PHMS and PHHS). School menus can be found on our website [HERE](#).

How do I know if my child is purchasing a meal that qualifies as free?

At the elementary level, we have always ensured that students are choosing a complete meal that will be charged at the meal price (usually adding a fruit or vegetable to qualify). At PHMS and PHHS, students become more independent and it is more challenging to persuade students to make those choices so we have traditionally allowed students to make their own choices. As a result of this change and the fact that we know parents will want to ensure their student is getting the meal at no charge, we will be modifying our service to ensure that in addition to elementary students, every PHMS or PHHS student who purchases an entree will have the minimum choices necessary to be able to qualify as a free meal. For example: if a student at PHMS or PHHS chooses a sandwich entree or a salad entree, the plate or package will have a fruit or vegetable packaged with it and that entree + fruit/veg qualifies as a free meal. Students are allowed to get additional fruit/vegetable servings at no charge and milk is optional.

See more details [HERE](#) about what qualifies as a meal.

Why must meals meet certain guidelines to be FREE?

The USDA wants to ensure that any meal that is funded by the government meets certain nutrition qualifications. A school cannot be reimbursed for parts of a meal, the meal must be sold as a unit.

Will my student still use their cafeteria account?

Yes, students will still use cafeteria accounts. Families can still deposit money into accounts for the purchase of ala carte foods. If families would like to request a refund or transfer of funds in accounts, you can do so by completing our online form at www.smcsc.com/nutrition.

Will free meals be a cost to SMCSC?

This program is fully funded by the federal government and all costs to SMCSC are fully reimbursed through federal funding. The federal programs that we are able to operate under due to this waiver also provide program simplification, which means that we can focus our team's time and talents on preparing the nutritious and tasty meals our students enjoy rather than the extreme administrative burden it has been to track meals and student payments while operating multiple feeding programs due to the COVID19 pandemic.

Do I still need to complete a Free/Reduced application if I think I qualify?

No meal application is required to receive free meals. Families must complete the meal application in order to qualify for textbook assistance and P-EBT benefits (if applicable).

update 7/20/21 - Will SMCSC provide weekly meal distribution in SY 21-22?

SMCSC Nutrition Services operated weekly meal distribution for students who were unable to attend school due to COVID-19 related school closures or quarantine from March 2020 until July 2021. During this time period, we served nearly 379,000 meals to children in our community! This was an honor to be able to provide meals for our students. It was also a very difficult and labor-intensive task for our staff to manage alongside in-person student meals. We have some true school nutrition heroes who worked tirelessly nearly every week to make sure this program was a success. SMCSC Nutrition Services will have far more in-person students this school year and we have decided that we have to focus our time and efforts on our regular meal programs and will not be offering weekly meal distribution this school year.

203 South Heritage Way, Pendleton, IN 46064 | Phone 765-778-2152 | Fax 765-778-8207

Nondiscrimination Statement and Policy

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